

Part II

APPLICATION



Over the second half of the eighteenth century, the Revolutionary generation would grapple again and again with questions of the most fundamental sort. They knew they were venturing into a new world, politically. What sort of society did they want? How would a modern republic work, and how could they try to ensure its survival? Could a republic on the geographical scale of the thirteen colonies even be governable, given the relatively small size of the ancient city-states? The republics of the Greeks, the Romans, and, in the mid-seventeenth century, the English, had all proven short-lived. Could the Americans do better? Could they devise a national republic that could last?

There were very few answers available, especially from recent history. Instead, they reached back to the classical world. They would apply the lessons they saw in the experience of the Roman Republic and, beyond that, the Greek cities. It would prove a distant and hazy guide, but it was the only one they had.